



CASTE PROBLEMS IN INDIAN SOCIETY AN OBSERVATION

DUBBA RAMA KRISHNA

Public Administration, Osmania University.

ABSTRACT

"Castes arise when the struggle between classes becomes intense and compromise becomes impossible. In such a situation, the class which wins creates a caste system to protect its privileges and provide a semblance of order to the society. But this semblance of order can never be just and creative and it produces an atmosphere for conflicts in future".

Introduction:

All societies have either a caste system or a tendency towards creating one. But, except in Bharat, caste in other countries comes and goes, there is a constant movement between caste and class. But in Bharat, the caste system has persisted for the last three thousand years or so, though it became weak in the Buddhist period. Its persistence in India is due to the fact that it has become bound up with religion, philosophy, politics, culture and economy.

Since conflict and its just resolution take the society forward, any attempt to put a lid on conflict creates stagnation. A suffocating atmosphere is thus created, doing immense harm to the society, destroying its creative impulses.

All through their history, a large number of Bharatiya people have felt left out of the system of governance and religious structures. But they have rarely revolted because the philosophy of Karma has enslaved their minds. If every individual feels that his sufferings today are the result of actions in the past birth, and liberation and birth in a higher caste are only possible if he faithfully fulfills his caste - samskar, he becomes totally incapable of rebelling against the system. That is why Bharatiya people have rarely rebelled against this inhuman system. Even the rare revolts had to be led by leaders from upper-castes like Buddha, Mahavira, Chakradhar, Guru Nanak and Basveshvar. Kabir and Vemana did not try to organize and revolt but ploughed a lonely furrow. It is in modern times that leaders from non-dvija castes like Mahatma Phule, Narayan Guru, Ramaswami Naicker and Ambedkar initiated and organized movements against certain aspects of the caste system. Mahatma Gandhi and Lohia also organized people against the caste system and succeeded in persuading sections of upper castes too to join the battle against the caste system.

From Buddha to Lohia there has been an unbroken line of resistance to the caste system. But, their visions and methods were different. So also were the directions of their attacks.



Caste in India has a regional aspect too. While occupation-based castes are more or less common to the entire country, though they don't intermarry, Kshatriyas are found only in western and northern India. In the east and south, there are no Kshatriyas though Ahoms of Assam, Marattas of Maharashtra, Reddys and Velamas of Telangana and Andhra, Vokalingas of Karnataka, Nairs of Kerala and, to an extent, Thevars of Tamil Nadu regard themselves as warriors. The result was that there was nobody to stop Brahmins in the South and East from acquiring unlimited powers which they went on to use ruthlessly.

While caste played a major role in the weakening and resultant enslavement of Bharat, ironically, this further strengthened the caste system. Most societies in times of crisis and tragedy, instead of introspecting, become defensive, retreat inwardly and try to protect their customs and traditional life styles. Thus, a vicious circle develops, weakening the society further. Hindus become more caste-bound, Muslims tighten the burqa on women further and regard every traditional law as sacred. Only rarely do leaders like Chandragupta Maurya, Razia, Ataturk arise who see the connection between internal injustice and external invasion.

Caste prevents the emergence of a cohesive, integrated and united society; it in fact, breaks up the society and creates hundreds of sub-societies, all inward looking and complete in them. These caste-based sub-societies then break up further into more societies and sub-castes. However, these societies are not autonomous, They are dependent on each other. An elaborate system of rituals has been created to link these caste-based societies to each other, giving a sense of satisfaction to every group. At weddings, births, festivals and deaths almost all castes make their unique contributions which are acknowledged and do not go unwarmed. Religion, economy, culture and social structure are brought together and woven into a single strand to provide satisfaction and reward while maintaining hierarchy. Whether this came about as a result of unfinished struggles and compromises we do not know. Hindus, very rarely, wrote their history. Since they believed in Yugas and the philosophy of Maya, history must have looked ephemeral indeed. If they had regarded history as a description of a people's attempt to fashion a civilization they would have perhaps attempted to write history. After all, the philosophy of Yugas describes the ascent and descent of civilization. But, neither Bharatiyas nor any other people regarded history as a history of people. Bharatiyas did not produce histories of dynasties also. The Rarnayana, the Mahabharata and, to a certain extent, the Puranas may be described as histories mixed up with mythology. Only a great effort can succeed in separating history from mythology in these books. But can we say that the Vedas are a history of the ancient Indian civilization? Whatever little history of Bharatiyas is available has been written by foreigners - Greeks, Chinese, Arabs and Turks. But Greeks, Chinese, Arabs and Turks have written as only people from countries of conquerors can write. Somebody has to make the stupendous efforts of writing a history of Bharatiyas. Strangely enough, another people, the Indians of the Americas, Aztecs, Incas and Mayas-too did not compile their histories, Most of them also believed in the philosophy of yugas.



Yet, repeated defeats interspread by a few victories of Indian arms resulted in inward-looking societies unable to explore the reasons for their subjugation.

Since the caste system creates political, economic, cultural and educational inequalities and puts a stop to occupational mobility, a sort of immobile and complacent political structure is created. Complacency leads to unpreparedness. Since the caste system seeped into, and ultimately took over, all religious communities, invaders started regarding themselves and behaving as different castes. Thus Greeks, Turks, Afghans and Moghuls became "castes". Scythians and Huns, who did not have any religious axe to grind, were submerged in the Bharatiya caste system and became part of the Kshatriya caste and may be agricultural castes in some places. Buddhism, Jainism, Veerashaivism, Sikhism, Bharatiya Islam and Bharatiya Christianity too acquired caste overtones, but in a less vicious manner. Some tribal societies, especially those in constant contact with non-tribal, created their own caste structures which, however, were very loose. Caste, thus, became the most potent factor dividing and weakening Bharatiya people.

Caste discourages not only independent thinking and creativity but encourages an anti-work culture. There is no need for the upper caste-upper class strata to work and no incentive for depressed castes to do so except for a living. Inertia takes over. Deprivation adds its own quota of listlessness. While depressed castes suffer unbearable indignities at the hands of invaders, upper-castes quickly become part of the new establishment. Thus Brahmins of Sindh tell the invading Arab chief, Qasim, that they should be regarded as natural "leaders" and "spokesmen" of the local people! Rajputs of all hues and colours supported and joined Moghul marauders. Shahji Marhatta and other Marhatta chiefs served anti-people Adil Shahi and Nizam Shahi regimes. Those who destroy the dignity of the depressed castes have to finally bow down before aliens; their loss of self-respect is inextricably linked to their casteist assault on the dignity of depressed castes. Shame can hardly have a place in such a dehumanizing system. However, whenever the caste system became weak, India became strong as immense energy and creativity were released. So the choice is clear - if Bharatiyas want to lead a dignified life the caste system has to be eliminated. In a self-respecting, strong and independent Bharat, the caste system cannot co-exist.

All the attacks on the Indian caste system, have failed to destroy it because they were made from one particular direction. Buddhism, Jainism, Veerashaivism, Chakradhar's and Narayan Guru's from the religious and philosophical directions, Guru Nanak's, Kabir's and Naicker's a rational point of view, Mahatma Phule's from a historical angle, Mahatma Gandhi's and Dr. Ambedkar's from a social angle. Lohia realized that caste in India is too firmly entrenched to be annihilated by an assault from anyone direction. He believed that the destruction of caste is possible only through a multi-pronged attack - philosophical, religious, historical, political, economic, educational, gender, based and social. Most of his own followers have ditched the agenda for short-term gains. This only shows how difficult the path is. Yet this does not detract from his analysis and solution of the problem.



Almost all political parties talk against the caste system. But it is only a ritual. In reality they practice casteism even in their day to day functioning. Since casteism separates the individual from the country and society and binds him to his caste and, finally, family, dynasticism has become a regular feature of our politics - though it may be said here that there are other reasons also for the emergence of dynastic politics in India e.g. Feudalism, concentration of wealth and power in a few hands, etc.

Another aspect of caste may be noted. Though the gender problem is universal, it acquires casteist overtones in India, Depressed caste women suffer from double oppression - that of caste and gender-based injustice. The notion of pollution is rigidly applied to the man-woman relationship. While upper-caste men may develop intimacy with depressed caste women without being "polluted", upper-caste women are "polluted" if they develop physical relationship with depressed caste men! But neither upper caste men nor women are allowed to have a legal relationship with depressed caste men and women. Intimacy flourishes, though sometimes, it is consumed by the fires of Karamchedu and Chundur. At the same time, even among depressed castes, marriage is not possible though love and intimacy are ignored. Men and women of all castes thus suffer from emotional and psychological problems.

Society disintegrates and thousands of societies are born making a mockery of nationalism. Every caste group exists autonomously and has a society of its own. It finds the meaning of life only in its small sangham. While the caste system creates a pyramid, the pyramid itself consists of thousands of parallel lines. At the same there is a vertical pressure reaching down to the base line. The pressure grows as it moves down and becomes almost unbearable at the lowest level. The pyramid debases those at the top and degrades those at the lowest level.

Yet, undoubtedly, attacks on the caste system mounted by Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, Narayan Guru, Naicker, Dr. Ambedkar and Lohia have led to a weakening of the system. The "new" economic policy and privatization, is however bringing back all the evils of the caste system through the back door. There is nothing new in the "new" economic policy. It is as old as capitalism and colonialism. Capitalism has always been an ideology of the exploitation of the weak. It did not collapse as Marx had predicted because the real surplus had come from colonies. More colonies and more ruthless exploitation made it possible for the West to throw some crumbs to its working class. The Russian Communist system collapsed because it tried to ape the Western production system without colonies of its own. Of course, imitation of the West made it imperative for Soviet Russia to destroy human rights of its citizens, to extract a surplus from its peasants, shattering the rural content of the communist ideology. Both capitalism and communism create their own caste structures

At the same time, the use of hatred to settle social issues not only has the potential to create internecine violence, it only touches the fringe of the problem.



Ramaswami Naicker's anti-Brahmin movement only dislodged the Brahmins, not Brahminism, which is now being practiced by his followers. Witness the Vanniyar revolt and Thevar-Dalit conflict in Southern Tamil Nadu. Unwittingly, the fight for social justice and self-respect has turned into a new slogan -the Brahmin is dead, long live Brahminism!.

Yet, the caste system practices a type of violence which is aimed at the mind. If you are prepared to adjust yourself to the unjust system, you are allowed to survive physically, even to speak against it. Depressed castes became reconciled to the system through a process of brain-washing. In our own times, Brahmins of Tamil Nadu shifted from jobs and politics to business. Since they did not want to fight their, own brand of casteism, they could not possibly take on the Dravida Kazhagam brand of casteism. They have survived. So what hatred did to casteism in Tamil Nadu was a shifting of other positions but not the position on caste, Perhaps If the Dravida Kazhagam movement had adopted a revolutionary approach to casteism instead of one based on hatred, the Brahmin could have been cleansed of the caste poison. The anti-Brahmin movement failed to achieve this because it was based on hatred and unrelenting antagonism and in the process got itself injected with Brahminism. You recreate yourself in the perceived enemy's image acquiring all his qualities in the process. Anger against injustice should be based on seeing the practitioner as a misguided person. Both injustice and the unfairness of the practitioner should be removed through law and resistance, To be anti-Brahmin is as dangerous as being Brahministic.

Castes sans occupational immobility may remain but injustice must go. The Reservation system is only a part of the approach. Inter-caste and inter community marriages must be promoted. Separate reservations must be made for depressed castes of Muslim and Christian communities. It is wrong to assume that reservations have come only now. In fact, the caste system itself is based on unjust reservations founded on prejudices. Therefore, inter-caste marriages are a part of social mobility.

A new incomes and wages policy has to be evolved which will lessen economic disparities and attack the concept of superiority of mental work and inferiority of manual labour. Without an attack on the internal colonial economic structure, the caste system cannot be weakened, let alone eliminated.

While primary and secondary education must be free, compulsory, relevant, uniform and equal, higher education too has to be relevant and equal. A new system should be evolved so that there is no heart-burning. The present educational system is not only irrelevant but is creating new socio-economic inequalities. The pre-British educational system was more relevant. There is now a system with a slot for every class, but since class and caste overlap, it means one for every caste-class. For the most oppressed of course it means no education at all.

Millions die every year of such curable ailments like malnutrition, malaria and cholera, most of them belonging to depressed castes. A national health-care



system based on the supply of nutritious food and cheaper health-care systems like folk medicine. Ayurveda, Unani and Homoeopathy should be established. What is happening now .is the opposite, abolition of whatever cheap health care is available by throwing out health care from the public sector and starting of five-star "super-specialty" hospitals. You have to have large amounts of money to be cured of any ailment.

India now has two parallel cultures - folk and classical - leading to snobbery among upper-castes and upper classes. This only fuels casteism. Folk and classical traditions must be woven into a new pattern combining folk spontaneity and classical structures and a systemic approach.

Finally, a caste class approach is necessary to eliminate caste injustice. Women of all castes and the poor of the upper-castes also suffer injustice. But their suffering is being ignored. This will lead to sectarianism and further hardening of attitudes. The poor among upper-castes and women of all castes must be brought into the struggle against the caste system as was advocated by Lohia, Therein lays their liberation and the liberation of India. It will be suicidal for the poor among upper-castes to join upper-class upper-castes who only want to use them for their own political purposes. The oppressed castes must extend the hand of friendship to them ignoring their political bosses and self-seeking intellectuals. For this to happen, a new movement at the grassroots will be needed. Women have the capacity and the skill to do this. But they will have to declass and decaste themselves for this struggle, the greatest struggle of Indian ' history.

References:

- 1) Indian History (0-1526) - (CH-1) Telugu Akadami.
- 2) Indian History (A.D. 1526 to 1964)-(CH-2)Telugu Akademi.
- 3) Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Rachanalu - Prasangalu, Vol.G, 7, 8.
- 4) GathiTarkam, Ambedkarism Marxism (1991), B.S. Ramulu.
- 5) Kulam, Vargan - Bojjatharakam.
- 6) D.D. Koshambi Shudravarname Elaputtindi -
- 7) Bharatiya Samajam CSO-2 - Telugu Akademi.
- 8) Bharatiya Samajam - Neti Rajakiya Parinamalu (2004), B.S. Ramulu.
- 9) B.S. Ramulu Ambedkarism Socialism (1994),
- 10) Nallapoddu-Dalit Women Literature, 1991-2002.
- 11) Sakshi, Human Rights Watch, Andhra Pradesh, News letters.